

## H.R. 918, the ‘Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act’

*An other than honorable (OTH) discharge, is often issued to servicemembers for minor misconduct, including being late to formation and poor attendance. These actions, however, can be linked with behavior seen in servicemembers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Often servicemembers with clear medical histories of PTSD improperly receive an OTH discharge rather than receiving a medical discharge or being retained in the military for treatment and rehabilitation. The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act would grant certain veterans with OTH discharges access to VA mental healthcare services.*

### Quick facts:

1. Since 2009, the Army has separated at least 22,000 combat veterans who had been diagnosed with mental health disabilities or traumatic brain injury (TBI) for alleged misconduct, despite reforms intended to halt the administrative separations of veterans suffering from service-related conditions.
2. In May 2017, the [Government Accountability Office](#) found that 62% of the 91,764 service members separated for misconduct from FY2011 – FY 2015 had been diagnosed within two years prior to separation with PTSD, TBI, or other conditions that could be associated with misconduct. Of those, 23% (or 13,282) received an other-than-honorable characterization of service.
3. According to a 2016 VA report, 20 veterans per day commit suicide. Preliminary evidence collected by VA suggests that there are decreased rates of suicide among veterans receiving VA health care as opposed to veterans who do not.
4. Depending on the circumstances, veterans with “bad paper” may not be eligible for a broad array of VA healthcare and benefits, including mental healthcare services that may be critical in the case of veterans with a history of PTSD or other mental illness.
5. A similar exception to standard VA access rules exists for military sexual trauma (MST). In the case of MST, veterans are eligible for MST-related care with VA regardless of their discharge classification and VA healthcare enrollment status.

### Passed in the Omni:

1. **Require the VA Secretary to provide initial mental health assessments and mental & behavioral healthcare services to veterans with an OTH discharge, including those at risk of suicide or harming others.**
2. **Requires the VA Secretary to establish a formal character of service determination process to trigger reviews of the character of discharge for potential eligibility of VA benefits.**

**Supporting Organizations:** Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), American Veterans (AMVETS), The American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).